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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0081
INFO RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 6729
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0570
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0902
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 4454
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 4554
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 1361
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 4639
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 2521
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5479
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 2294
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 8436
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 1609
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE 4275
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 1403
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR 4742
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 5908
RHMFISS/HQ USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 7492
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHMFISS/HQ USSOCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

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SUBJECT: MODERATE KASHMIRI SEPARATISTS BANDING TOGETHER
PRIOR TO STATE ELECTIONS

Classified By: PolCouns Ted Osius for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

COMING IN FROM THE COLD

1. (C) Former violent insurgent and longtime peaceful Kashmiri separatist Shabir Shah decided January 14 to join the Mirwaiz faction of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference led by moderate separatist Mirwaiz Omar Farooq. The decision had been a long time coming, with Mirwaiz and his cohorts spending over a year courting Shah and urging his participation in their group. Shah's decision further isolates hard line Kashmiri separatist Syed Ali Shah Geelani, whose supporters have steadily defected to the Mirwaiz's more constructive group for the past two years. Shah is known as a lone operator with a big ego, so it is uncertain how well he will submit to second fiddle status in Mirwaiz's group, or if the group can even sustain his entry.

SAFETY IN NUMBERS

2. (C) Left unstated in the press conference and the news stories is the fact that Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front leader Yasin Malik represents a growing threat to the Mirwaiz Hurriyat because of his proven ability to demonstrate grass roots support for his separatist formula from hundreds of thousands of ordinary Kashmiris. Malik's whistlestop tour of the entire Valley in 2007 resulted in speeches to as many as 500,000 people, and his petition campaign in 2006 collected what he claims were a million signatures. Mirwaiz and Shah are both feeling pinched by Malik and by mainstream

politicians from the PDP, National Conference, and Congress parties, so they may have decided there was safety for their standing in banding together.

NERVOUS ABOUT ELECTIONS

13. (C) With state-level elections coming in fall 2008, the Mirwaiz Hurriyat will be hard pressed by the Government of India to join the electoral process, but their leaders have told us that they see only risks and few certain gains in doing so. We imagine the Mirwaiz Hurriyat members will again sit on the bench in this round of polls, while seeking to keep building themselves up into the undisputed voice of the separatist tendency in Kashmir so as to leverage that to try to engage with the Indian Government on a more equal basis. If polling turnout in the fall election is strong, and competitors like the PDP or NC do well, however, it will signify what most observers already believe and what many experts on Kashmir and Kashmiris themselves say: the majority of Kashmiris are sick of the pro-Independence rhetoric, fear what is happening in Pakistan, and want to return to the status quo ante of 1989 and before. If that is the message, the Mirwaiz Hurriyat will realize its days of prominence are coming to an end.

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